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FORTY-FIRST SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Sweeya SANTIPITAKS (Thailand)

Moderator's summary of the panel discussion and dialogue
on education and training of women

1. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized the central role of education for the advancement of women and the numerous benefits yielded for development and the empowerment of women. Education and training were necessities for the full and equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making and in shaping the future of their communities.

2. Education was a constitutional right in many countries, but the full enjoyment of this right remained restricted for many citizens, in particular girls and women. To implement the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990), mobilization of all for education was needed. In many countries, various initiatives, including at the highest political level, had been taken to reach those goals and implement commitments to education made at the Fourth World Conference on Women. To ensure equal access for all to education, a joint effort of Governments and society in general was considered a necessity, starting from early childhood onwards. The essential role and responsibility of the State in providing access for all to quality education was confirmed. However, it was emphasized that in line with decentralization efforts, the role of regional and local institutions as well as non-governmental organizations and the private sector had gained importance. While some requested an improvement in quality in public rather

than private schools, maintaining free public education at the primary level, others favoured a more liberal policy environment with competition between the private and public sector. A new alignment between academia and non-governmental organizations would contribute to the type of action needed, based on mutual benefit and synergy. Important examples of successful networking at the national and regional levels were mentioned.

3. Women still accounted for the majority of the world's adult illiterates. These numbers had been steadily increasing owing to rapid population growth in some subregions. A strong plea was made for the eradication of illiteracy and the attainment of the goals defined in the Platform for Action; that is, reduction of the female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level. Successful literacy campaigns were being carried out in many countries jointly by government and non-governmental organizations and with the active support of the media. As illiteracy and poverty were closely linked, successful literacy campaigns should include technical training and training for income-generation as well as information on health and citizenship.

4. It was acknowledged that general and basic education was fundamental and provided the foundation for further education and training. Completion by all children of high-quality primary and lower secondary schooling and the provision of remedial general education to adults, while not sufficient, would make a more lasting contribution to equalization than any policy measure concerning higher education or training alone.

5. A number of obstacles continued to discriminate against girls' access to education, such as customary attitudes, inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials, sexual harassment and lack of adequate schooling facilities. As a result, girls in some subregions performed poorly, repeated grades frequently and had higher drop-out rates than boys. It was reported that the main reason for girls dropping out was their obligation to perform household duties, early marriages and early pregnancies.

6. In countries in transition, specific training and retraining of women and adaptation of training to the changing needs of the labour market were needed and considered essential for ensuring women's employability.

7. Girls and women in especially difficult circumstances and with special needs faced discrimination in terms of access to education and availability of training materials and support systems. A favourable learning environment that responded to special needs would enhance educational performance. It was noted that new technologies opened up new avenues for training students with disabilities.

8. To improve access and retention of girls in schools, a number of actions had been taken. The recruitment of more female teachers reduced the fear of sexual harassment and at the same time provided role models for girls. Programmes of open education or mobile schools had proved successful, especially in remote rural areas or for certain populations such as ethnic minorities or nomadic groups. In many developing countries, support mechanisms included the development of new technologies that eased the burden of household work of girls and women. The influence of parents, in particular mothers, on girls' education

was recognized, and various initiatives had been taken to involve them in the process. School feeding programmes were another measure to improve the retention of girls in schools. Mentoring programmes provided girls with positive role models and enhanced their motivation and self-esteem. In some countries, provisions were in place to transfer pregnant schoolgirls to other schools where teachers had been sensitized so as to reduce drop-out rates. There was a strong plea to reinforce sports and physical education, especially for girls and women.

9. Gender analysis in education and training was a basis for further analysis, and comprehensive, innovative proposals for policy-making. The mainstreaming of gender concerns included the removal of bias from school materials and teacher training, the introduction of gender-sensitive educational materials at all levels, especially in mathematics, in science and technology and in the development of curricula; the advancement of gender studies; and the establishment of a post of gender ombudsman. It also included the promotion of more women into decision-making positions in educational institutions. Non-discriminatory education benefited both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributed to equality between women and men.

10. To be effective, vocational training of women had to be linked to the labour market, or women would continue to face constraints and unequal opportunities. Women's employability was the key to access to both employment and self-employment opportunities. Persistent job segregation originated in the educational choices of men and women as regards fields of study and specialization. Initiatives to bring women into non-traditional fields had had some success. A redesigned and up-to-date labour market information system was needed. More women should enter the expanding field of new information technology. To enable women to participate in training or retraining schemes, support systems, including child care, were needed.

11. Only a minority of women entered and succeeded in the field of science and technology. A number of initiatives had been taken to make such fields accessible to girls and women and to develop their creative potential. These initiatives included the development of specific projects for women, incentives such as competitions and rewards, scientific meetings, travelling exhibitions and the provision of science equipment for girls. Public recognition of and information on famous women scientists as potential role models would be beneficial. The necessity of enhancing the motivation of girls to continue higher education and to reach for positions in decision-making in the scientific field was stressed. Psycho-social factors played an important role in changing the attitude of girls and their parents towards such choices.

12. In a time of rapid change in knowledge, societal norms and technology, education and training by necessity became a lifelong process. For women, lifelong education was still a means to gain basic knowledge, including literacy, and for breaking the cycle of poverty. Lifelong learning included education for citizenship and democracy, legal literacy, access to information and informed choice of information. Distance learning and the use of new communication technologies in adult education benefited women, who often struggled against lack of mobility, time and financial constraints. The precondition for successful adult education was that women would recognize its

value. Any form of adult education required a favourable or facilitating environment and should be developed in a participatory process involving all actors. The first steps had been taken in some countries to create a universally accessible lifelong education system with flexibility that would allow the transfer of transcripts from different establishments and recognition of credits and would hence benefit women greatly.

13. The trend to reduce educational budgets, which were also affected by increased demand due to population growth in many countries and structural adjustment measures, had a negative impact on educational systems, particularly for girls. More strategic planning of resources in the field of education was required, including sufficient allotments to primary education, as well as the reallocation of funds from other sectors, such as military spending, to education. In this respect, the 20/20 concept as accepted in the World Summit for Social Development and reinforced in the Platform for Action was recalled. The international community and international organizations were requested to support national initiatives and implementation of the targets set in the Platform for Action, including the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries for overall official development assistance.
